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ABSTRACT

An ERIC digest considers several approaches to community study within the social studies curriculum. Material is divided into four sections. Following an introduction, "A rationale for community study" outlines skills and concepts that can be presented through community study and presents the rationale that community study can provide greater relevance to national and global events. "Can participation in the community improve student motivation?" argues that community studies provide valuable opportunities for students to become involved in public life and thus develop citizenship participation skills. Research indicating that experiential community-based learning raises student motivation is also presented. "Why aren't community- based strategies more widely implemented?" considers the following reasons for the low implementation of community studies programs: extensive preparation time and perceived low administrator support. "How can the community be implemented in social studies education?" describes specific strategies for integrating a community--based social study component. Emphasis is placed on a four dimensional model of community study: using the community as a source of content; using the community as a source of learning experience; community service as a dimension of community study; and using the community to enhance skill development. A list of resources concludes the paper. (LP)

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COMMUNITY STUDY

ERIC Digest No. 28

by

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by Leslie Hendrikson

Social studies programs are most often based on an expanded horizons approach, in which students focus on the community only in the early grades, with cursory references in the following years, as the focus of social studies moves to a "larger and seemingly more significant world" (Schug and Beery 1984). While the local community is usually studied at some point in the K-12 social studies program, it is not often a central organizing theme.

This ERIC Digest will examine a rationale for major themes of community study, including community-based education; community participation as a means of improving student motivation; common obstacles to the implementation of community study; and specific suggestions for implementing community study throughout the K-12 curriculum.

A rationale for community study

Schools have long functioned as if they were a separate rather than an integral part of the community. Having operated in isolation for so long, a failure to draw upon the many available resources in the community has persisted. Muth and Senesh (1977) argue that existing social studies programs, unfortunately, "separate schools from the realities of their own communities." For example, civics courses in many schools focus on state and national political institutions without providing students with opportunities to examine the political processes of their own communities.

Among approaches to using the community as a tool for developing citizenship and other social studies competencies are (1) community study, in which students examine the social systems of a specific community (usually their own), and (2) community-based education, a component of community study, in which students view the community as a source of information about a wide range of topics. Grounded in participation, community approaches can provide students with opportunities to apply, extend, and examine knowledge, skills, and values they have been exposed to in the social studies classroom. Even when focusing on historical and political developments at a national and global level, examples from the local community can give national and global events a greater immediacy. If we consider education not only as preparation for more education, but as a preparation for life, community study is well justified as a low-cost means of providing an immediacy that textbooks lack and as a way of making academic activities more relevant and motivating.

Can participation in the community improve student motivation?

Using the community as a valuable resource can provide opportunities for young people to become engaged in public life and learn essential participation skills. Research has shown that student motivation in social studies is low, in part because teaching modes in most social studies classrooms rarely, if ever, include inquiry, discovery, simulation, and experiential or community-based strategies (Morrissett 1982; Goodlad 1983). Thus, students view social studies as lacking in variety and opportunities for participation. Schug and Beery (1984) suggest that one way to improve student interest in social studies may be to increase student participation by strengthening community study as a component of the curriculum. Parker and Jarolimek (1984, 15) comment on specific ways in which participation experiences in the community can enhance student learning:

> Participation experiences are by nature public and interactive. They can expose students to a rich variety of people, values, ethnic and religious identities, and problem-solving approaches. Consequently, participation experiences demand communication and encourage taking others' perspectives.

Why aren't community-based strategies more widely implemented?

The idea of using the community as a laboratory to enhance the teaching of social studies, one that is frequently recommended in the literature, is unfortunately one that is seldom implemented. One of the reasons why the local community is not more often a central focus in school programs is that community-based education requires more preparation by the teacher and student than other approaches to social studies. Hence, greater time demands make it difficult to integrate community-based activities into an already busy school day.

Another reason community-based experiences are not encouraged more often is that teachers do not feel that building supervisors and district administrators will be supportive of students leaving the school grounds for community-based projects. It should be remembered at this point, that even when going out into the community is an impossibility, there are a number of ways that the community can be brought into the classroom, such as inviting community resource persons and using primary source materials. In addition, more and more publishers (e.g., Scott Foresman and Graphic Learning Corporation) and a number of school districts (e.g., Arlington, Virginia; Wichita, Kansas; and Aurora, Colorado) are developing supplementary community-based social studies materials.

How can the community be implemented in social studies education?

In *Constructing a Community System-Based Social Science Curriculum*, John W. Muth and Lawrence Senesh (1977) describe an educational tool known as "The Community Social Profile System," in which a set of documents known as Community Social Profiles (CSPs) are prepared by faculty, together with junior and senior high school students and local representatives of agriculture, labor, business, government, and education. A CSP is a concise, clearly written description of the social system of a community—one that undergoes constant revision and updating by citizens, educators, and students. By focusing on five different dimensions of the community's life—its physical environment, history, economics aspects, political structures and processes, and culture—a Community Social Profile System places a particularly creative, intellectual focus on making social science knowledge useful for students.

Other ideas for using the community in social science education have been suggested by Schug and Beery (1984)

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in *Community Study: Applications and Opportunities*. Using a four-part model, Schug and Beery offer specific suggestions representing four dimensions of local community study.

1. **Using the community as a source of content.** The local community can provide rich examples to illustrate many concepts from the social studies. History, economics, political science, geography, citizenship education, law-related education, values education, future studies, and global studies can take advantage of local community content and resources to illustrate important ideas.

2. **Using the community as a source of learning experiences.** Field trips and guest speakers are the most common elements of community-based learning experiences. Possible community field-trip sites include the local history society, a city council meeting, a public hearing, political party headquarters, human service agencies, and historical sights. One activity might include looking for and finding information about old buildings. For example, students from Alexandria Public Schools in Virginia were introduced to the history of their community through a study of its building and urban growth. By examining factors which have changed the community as well as the relationship between the physical environment and lifestyles, students were encouraged to think about solutions and future problems of community development (Henes 1983). Other learning experiences might include block study (Eckbreth 1984), using primary source materials such as old newspapers, diaries, and letters, and visiting pioneer cemeteries (Beery 1978). Interviewing is another excellent approach in which students learn concepts about demography, roles, and social change, as they acquire skills in collecting data, testing, hypotheses, and evaluating data (Meed-Mezetta 1983).

Guest speakers might include public officials, people from the business community, labor leaders, members of civic groups, and public employees (Schug and Beery 1984).

3. **Community service as a dimension of community study.** Recently the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer 1983) identified as one of "four essential goals" of a high school education, the involvement of all students in activities that "fulfill their social and civic obligations through school and community services." Parker and Jarolimek (1984) further recommend that students become involved in community service projects such as working in health clinics, serving on youth hotlines, producing a community newspaper, and painting low-income housing.

4. **Using the community to enhance skill development.** A final dimension of community-based education is skill development. Through community study the student can apply skills such as conducting surveys, doing anthropological and historical research, gathering data, developing interpersonal skills, and, as mentioned earlier, developing participation skills.

RESOURCES

The following is a bibliography of resources, including references in this digest. Those entries followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and/or papercopy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For price information write EDRS, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210.

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